

Commendation ceremony held for home-based child carers of Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (with photos)

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) held a commendation ceremony for the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project today (May 10) to honour about 200 participating home-based child carers (HCCs) for the caring and neighbourhood spirit they displayed when taking care of needy children in the community. The SWD also took the opportunity to encourage people who have a drive to help others to become HCCs.

The Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, accompanied by the Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Ms Alice Lau, and the Director of Social Welfare, Miss Charmaine Lee, officiated at the ceremony. Representatives of 15 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) subsidised by the SWD in providing the service also attended.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr Sun said that since its launch in 2008, the Project has been providing a flexible form of day child care service at the neighbourhood level to assist parents who cannot take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons. In the past 16 years, the Project has benefited about 150 000 children from needy families.

Mr Sun pointed out that with a view to strengthening the support for working families in childbearing and incentivising more families to join the labour market, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that the incentive payment for HCCs will be substantially increased in April this year, and the number of service places under the Project will be increased in the fourth quarter. Enhanced training for HCCs will also be in place in the fourth quarter. He encouraged participating HCCs to enrol in the training as well to enhance their child care skills, knowledge and confidence through revision and experience sharing.

Mr Sun expressed his gratitude to the participating HCCs for the tireless contributions they have made for the needy children in addition to taking care of their own families. He also thanked the 15 NGOs for their wholehearted support for both the Project and the HCCs. He appealed to participating carers to actively introduce the Project to their families and friends and motivate more people with a drive to help to become HCCs to expand the caring network in the community.

The SWD subsidises NGOs to operate the Project in 18 districts. There are now around 1 700 HCCs in the territory. The service operators have established mechanisms to recruit, assess, screen and train suitable HCCs, and arrange service matching.

Members of the public interested to become HCCs may contact the operators in their respective districts. Details of the Project are available on the SWD website (www.swd.gov.hk/en/pubsvc/family/cat_childcareservice/daychildcares/nsccp/index.html).



12 persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations (with photo)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police

Force codenamed "Champion" and "Windsand" for four consecutive days from May 6 to yesterday (May 9). A total of eight suspected illegal workers, three suspected employers and one suspected aider and abettor were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided six target locations including premises under renovation and restaurants. Six suspected illegal workers and two suspected employers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised four men and two women, aged 30 to 58. Among them, one man was a holder of recognisance form, which prohibits him from taking any employment. In addition, one woman was suspected of using and being in possession of a forged Hong Kong identity card. Two women, aged 47 and 52, were suspected of employing the illegal workers and were also arrested.

During operation "Champion", enforcement officers raided 37 target locations in Western district. Two suspected illegal workers, one suspected employer and one suspected aider and abettor were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised one man and one woman, aged 41 and 47. One man, aged 43, was suspected of employing the illegal worker. One woman, aged 60, who was suspected of aiding and abetting a person who breached the condition of stay in Hong Kong was also arrested.

An ImmD spokesman said, "Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him or her shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties."

The spokesman warned, "As stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. Under the prevailing laws, it is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person, or to transfer an identity card to another person without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$100,000 and up to 10 years' imprisonment."

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The

High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law by employing illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct an initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the ImmD officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter or temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.



[Grading of beach water quality](#)

released

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) today (May 10) released the latest grading of water quality for 39 gazetted beaches (see Note 1) and one non-gazetted beach (see Note 2).

Twenty-one beaches were rated as Good (Grade 1), 12 as Fair (Grade 2) and seven as Poor (Grade 3).

Grade 1 beaches are:

Big Wave Bay Beach*	Lower Cheung Sha Beach
Cheung Chau Tung Wan Beach*	Middle Bay Beach
Chung Hom Kok Beach	Pui O Beach*
Clear Water Bay First Beach	South Bay Beach*
Clear Water Bay Second Beach*	St. Stephen's Beach
Deep Water Bay Beach*	Stanley Main Beach*
Hap Mun Bay Beach*	Tai Po Lung Mei Beach*
Hung Shing Yeh Beach*	Tong Fuk Beach
Kiu Tsui Beach	Turtle Cove Beach
Kwun Yam Beach	Upper Cheung Sha Beach
Lo So Shing Beach	

Grade 2 beaches are:

Butterfly Beach*	Kadoorie Beach*
Cafeteria New Beach	Repulse Bay Beach*
Cafeteria Old Beach	Shek O Beach*
Castle Peak Beach	Silver Mine Bay Beach*
Discovery Bay Tai Pak Beach	Silverstrand Beach*
Golden Beach*	Trio Beach

Grade 3 beaches are:

Anglers' Beach*	Lido Beach*
Approach Beach	Ma Wan Tung Wan Beach*
Casam Beach*	Ting Kau Beach*
Hoi Mei Wan Beach	

Compared with the grading released last week, Clear Water Bay First Beach has been upgraded from Grade 2 to Grade 1, and Anglers' Beach and Ma Wan Tung Wan Beach from Grade 4 to Grade 3. Repulse Bay Beach and Shek O Beach have been changed from Grade 1 to Grade 2, and Ting Kau Beach from

Grade 2 to Grade 3.

"The changes are generally within the normal range of fluctuation of the bacteriological water quality of the beaches," an EPD spokesman said.

Under the present grading system, beaches are classified into four grades, namely Good (Grade 1), Fair (Grade 2), Poor (Grade 3) and Very Poor (Grade 4), according to the level of E. coli in the water. Grades are calculated on the basis of the geometric mean of the E. coli counts on the five most recent sampling occasions.

While the ratings represent the general water quality at the beaches, the EPD spokesman reminded members of the public that water quality could be temporarily affected during and after periods of heavy rain. Bathers should avoid swimming at beaches for up to three days after a tropical cyclone or heavy rainfall.

A summary of beach grades is published weekly before the weekend. The latest beach grades based on the most current data may be obtained from the EPD's website on Beach Water Quality (www.epd.gov.hk/epd/beach) or the beach hotline, 2511 6666. Members of the public can also obtain the latest daily water quality forecast information for all beaches that are open for swimming through the Beach Water Quality Forecast mobile application (available for download from: www.epd.gov.hk/en/BWQApp) or the dedicated beach water quality forecast page (www.epd.gov.hk/en/BWQForecast) on the EPD's beach thematic website.

Note 1: Lifesaving services are provided by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department at 22 gazetted beaches, marked with an asterisk (*) above, from April 1. Due to the damage caused to the footpaths leading to Chung Hom Kok Beach by landslides, the beach is temporarily closed until further notice. For details, please refer to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department's Special Announcement (www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/beach/index.html).

Note 2: This refers to Discovery Bay Tai Pak Beach which is a non-gazetted beach that has no lifesaving service.

[Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan](#)

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba,

Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on May 9 to noon today (May 10), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 212 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan"

(www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 52 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 49 957 samples of food imported from Japan (including 32 429 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 12 886 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Friday, May 10, 2024 is 106 (same as yesterday's index).